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Unmanned demo aircraft exceeds 10,000 combat flight hours

NAVAL AIR SYSTEMS COMMAND, PATUXENT RIVER, Md. —The Navy's unmanned [RQ-4A Broad Area Maritime Surveillance Demonstrator \(BAMS-D\)](#) surpassed 10,000 flight hours in December 2013 in support of operations in the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) area of responsibility.

Now entering its sixth year of deployment, BAMS-D provides intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance support to the fleet and is used to collect lessons learned for its successor, [the MQ-4C Triton unmanned air system](#).

"This was originally intended to be a six-month concept demonstration," said [Capt. Jim Hoke](#), program manager for the Persistent Maritime Unmanned Aircraft System program office (PMA-262), who oversees the BAMS-D program. "Six years later, the tempo of operations and demand for products from BAMS-D has remained steady and the deployment has been extended indefinitely."

Flown by both Navy and contractor personnel, the asset is controlled from Patuxent River and operated under Commander, Patrol and Reconnaissance Wing 2, Commander, Task Force 57 in theater.

In a typical mission, the aircraft normally tracks surface shipping and images littoral targets of naval interest in the CENTCOM AOR, said Mike McDaniel, the former BAMS-D test director, who is now Triton's test director. Within minutes, crew members analyze these tracks and images and then send them out to units worldwide.

"The speed of delivery, combined with the enormous quantity of information collected on each flight, has made BAMS-D invaluable to the fleet," he said.

The Navy originally acquired two RQ-4A aircraft to build Navy experience in operating large unmanned aircraft and develop tactics and doctrine for the Triton program. RQ-4A can fly at altitudes above 50,000 feet for typically a 24-hour duration. To date, the Navy's RQ-4A fleet has flown more than 750 sorties during test and real-world operations and has flown a total of 12,000 hours.